

LESSON PLANS FOR NYC DOE’S HIDDEN VOICES CURRICULUM: CITIZENSHIP

Each lesson can be taught on its own or as part of the unit.

[Citizenship: Introducing the Theme of Citizenship in APIDA History](#)

[Citizenship and Acts of Exclusion Against the Chinese](#)

[Citizenship and the Right to Public Education](#)

[Citizenship and Race Challenged in the Court](#)

[Citizenship and Japanese American Incarceration](#)

[Citizenship and Immigration during the Civil Rights Movement Era](#)

[Citizenship and Islamophobia After 9/11](#)

[Citizenship and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Sovereignty](#)

1.7.0 - Citizenship: Introducing the Theme of Citizenship in Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) History

The Asian American Education Project

This lesson was produced as part of the [New York City Department of Education's Hidden Voices curriculum](#). Content was created by The Asian American Education Project and this version is owned by The Asian American Education Project. As such, users agree to attribute work to The Asian American Education Project.

Grade Levels	7-10
Lesson Overview	Citizenship in the United States can be obtained through birthright citizenship or naturalization. However, Asian American Pacific Islander Desi Americans (APIDA) have faced many restrictions and exclusions regarding their citizenship rights. The U.S. government also has infringed on the sovereignty of Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders who inhabited the land or their respective islands long before the creation of the United States. In this lesson, students will examine what it means to be “American” and learn the complex history behind APIDA struggles with U.S. citizenship.
Focus Question	What barriers to U.S. citizenship have existed specifically for members of the APIDA community?
Lesson Objectives	Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Utilize observing and questioning skills to examine what it means to be an “American” as well as the benefits and history of U.S. citizenship for communities of color to contextualize the APIDA community’s struggle for citizenship rights.

Citizenship: Introducing the Theme of Citizenship in Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) History Essay

Background:

Citizenship is often the most privileged form of belonging to a nation. In the United States, full political rights—such as the right to vote and ability to hold public office—are predicated upon citizenship, as well as certain protections and rights that are not extended to non-citizens. Asian American Pacific Islander Desi Americans (APIDA) have been systematically excluded for decades from not just citizenship, but also entering the country. They however have resisted these challenges and fought for their rights and for inclusion. Obtaining citizenship has been one significant method for members of the APIDA community to gain stability and security amidst continued racism and xenophobia. Citizenship also provides them the opportunity to build community power and enact greater change.

Essay:

There are many ways that a person might identify themselves or another person. For example, there are several different ways of defining “American.” First, geographically, “American” could apply to anyone living in North and South America. Second, a person could identify as “American” by **nationality**, which refers to a person’s place of birth. Lastly, a person could define “American” as having U.S. citizenship. Citizenship is often the most popular definition for “American.”

In the United States there are two paths to becoming a citizen: birthright and naturalization. **Birthright citizenship** refers to all persons born in the United States (or born to parents who are U.S. citizens). **Naturalization** refers to the legal process that a person completes to become a citizen. While the Constitution gives all people in the U.S. certain rights and privileges, citizens of the U.S. receive particular rights that non-citizens do not have, such as the ability to vote and hold elected office, among others.

Throughout history, the U.S. government has enacted policies to limit and restrict the ability of different groups to gain citizenship. It has also infringed upon the **sovereignty** of Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.

Obtaining citizenship, or naturalization, is an important way that immigrants can gain stability and security, build power, and grow their communities in order to actively participate and engage in U.S. society. Asian immigrants have resisted racist laws and fought for citizenship rights. Notable activists include Wong Kim Ark, Bhagat Singh Thind, and Takao Ozawa.

The issue of citizenship is even more complicated for Native peoples and Pacific Islanders. As Indigenous Peoples, they have inhabited this land even before colonial settlers imposed their laws regarding land ownership and citizenship. These groups may have a more complex relationship with obtaining U.S. citizenship as it can represent a loss of sovereignty due to colonialism or imperialism. Some may have complicated feelings about their U.S. citizenship—rejecting the label “American”—and instead identify more strongly with their respective land/islands and its national identity. On the other hand, U.S. citizenship provides increased opportunities for participation in U.S. society.

Furthermore, not everyone on U.S. land is a citizen. The U.S. currently has five **territories**: American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The residents of these islands, except in American Samoa, are U.S. citizens but with limited rights. They do not have elected representatives in Congress and cannot vote for the U.S. President, but yet are required to pay federal taxes and serve in the U.S. military.

So what does it mean to be an “American”? According to a poll result of 1,000 U.S. adults, a substantial minority of respondents stated they consider “real Americans” as those who are born in the U.S. (and thus have birthright citizenship), who are Christian, or who speak English. The definitions of who is a “real” American have shifted during the country’s history and continue to evolve. Defining “American” is complicated and varies depending on who is being asked, and how they value race, **ethnicity**, nationality, or citizenship.

Bibliography:

- “Defining Citizenship.” *National Museum of American History*, 30 July 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230327012435/https://americanhistory.si.edu/democracy-exhibition/creating-citizens/defining-citizenship>.
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Citizenship.” *Britannica*, Britannica Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/citizenship>.
- Elfenbein, Caleb, and Peter Hanson. “Perspective | What does it mean to be a 'real' American?” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 3 Jan. 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/01/03/what-does-it-mean-be-real-american/>.
- González-Ramírez, Andrea. “Residents of US territories can serve in the military, but can't vote for president. Here's why some Islanders don't identify as American.” *Insider*, 01 July 2021, <https://www.insider.com/young-territory-residents-reject-american-question-us-citizenship-2021-7>.
- Odo, Franklin. “Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Making of the Nation (U.S. National Park Service).” National Parks Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders-in-the-making-of-the-nation.htm>.
- Sprunt, Barbara. “Simmering Disputes Over Statehood Are About Politics And Race. They Always Have Been.” *NPR*, NPR, 21 August 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/08/21/902334807/simmering-disputes-over-statehood-are-about-politics-and-race-they-always-have-b/>.
- “What Are the Benefits and Responsibilities of Citizenship?” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/guides/chapter2.pdf>.

Vocabulary¹:

- **Birthright Citizenship:** citizenship that is automatically granted to persons born in the United States or to those born to U.S. citizens
- **Ethnicity:** a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition, ancestry, or language
- **Nationality:** the status of belonging to a particular nation or country
- **Naturalization:** the legal process that a person undergoes to achieve citizenship
- **Sovereignty:** freedom from external control; the ability to rule over oneself without outside interference
- **Territory:** an organized division of a country that is under the jurisdiction of a nation but that is not yet admitted to the full rights of a state

¹ Definition adapted from Merriam-Webster

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways is citizenship a complicated issue especially for the APIDA community?
2. What are some barriers to gaining citizenship?
3. How are the citizenship struggles of Pacific Islanders in U.S. territories similar to and different from the struggles of immigrants in the United States?

Activity 1: Defining American

- A. Define the following terms with your students: Nationality, Race, and Ethnicity. Post the class-created definitions.
- B. **NOTE TO TEACHER:** Nationality is the status of belonging to a particular nation. Race is defined as a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits. Ethnicity refers to the identification of a group based on shared attributes that distinguish them from others. If time permits, give students an opportunity to identify themselves by nationality, race, and ethnicity. For example, one could identify as “American” by nationality, “Asian” by race, and “Vietnamese” by ethnicity.
- C. Ask students: What does it mean to be an American? Record student responses and display for all to see. Clarify that being “American” is a nationality and that people are much more than one identity.
- D. **NOTE TO TEACHER:** If time permits, have students make a list of all the different identities a person can have such as nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc. (Option: Learn more about intersectionalities as defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw.)
- E. Show students the “I am an American” (9/11 Ad Council) video:
<https://youtu.be/ISltHnLC0iA>
- F. Facilitate a discussion about the video using the following prompts:
1. How are the creators of the video defining what it means to be an American? How does this video support or extend your own definition of what it means to be American?
 2. How do factors like citizenship, birthplace, language, and/or race impact descriptions of what an American is?
- G. **NOTE TO TEACHERS:** Be sensitive to the fact that some of your students may not be citizens. Some may be undocumented or are permanent residents, etc. Broaden the definition of American to go beyond just citizenship.
- H. Inform students that the focus of this lesson is to identify the barriers to U.S. citizenship that the APIDA community has faced. Inform students that all the lessons in the unit will help prepare students to address the following question:
1. What barriers to U.S. citizenship have existed specifically for members of the APIDA community and how has this community struggled to overcome these barriers?

Activity 2: APIDA Definitions and U.S. Citizenship

- A. Distribute the worksheet entitled, [“Noticings and Wonderings.”](#)
1. Direct students to take notes on this worksheet throughout the unit and refer to them in order to participate in discussions and to complete assignments.
- B. **NOTE TO TEACHER:** All texts which include readings, videos, etc., have messages. Encourage students to critically consume the content that they receive by identifying and analyzing explicit and implicit messages. The “Noticings and Wonderings” strategy helps

students with this process of uncovering messages.

C. Have students make “Noticings” (observations) and record them in the left column. Model for students how to make noticings:

1. Show the “I am an American” (9/11 Ad Council) video (<https://youtu.be/ISltHnLC0iA>) and direct students to view the video with the mindset of making at least one significant observation. Explain that an observation can be anything that they see or hear in the video; observations are facts.
2. Have students share their observations and record at least one noticing in the left column of the worksheet. Make sure students are making noticings (observations) and not opinions. If needed, share some student examples and distinguish between facts and opinions. Remind students to go back to the text—in this case the video—to confirm their noticings.
3. Inform students that these noticings are used to generate questions, draw inferences and conclusions, and provide evidence for claims that can be used in discussions and/or writing assignments.

D. Have students generate “Wonderings” (questions) and record them in the right column. Model for students how to make wonderings:

1. Have students review their noticings. (If needed, show the video again and direct students to view with the mindset of generating questions.)
2. Have students generate a question about one of their noticings. Ask them: What questions do you have about the noticing? What more do you want to know? What is confusing or unclear about the noticing?
3. Encourage students to ask questions which helps them exercise their critical thinking skills by engaging with content. Inform them that questions provide topics for discussions and that discussions are important because they allow participants to grapple with tough topics so that they can expand their knowledge.

E. NOTE TO TEACHERS: Discussions are a key component of effective teaching and learning. Throughout this unit, provide students with multiple opportunities for discussions. Students need to hear different opinions and practice how to respond to them. They also need to negotiate meanings and make informed arguments based on facts. If not already part of your classroom culture, spend time setting up norms and expectations for discussions. Make sure students are kind and respectful. Encourage students to cite evidence from the provided resources. Allow them to draw from their own understandings and experiences with immigration as well. Moderate conversations and writings to address and correct any factually-incorrect or xenophobic arguments.

F. Explain what it means to be “APIDA”:

1. Inform students that there are different identifiers for the APIDA community: Asian American, AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander), AANHPI (Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander), and APIDA (Asian Pacific Islander Desi American).
2. Explain that these are identifiers used to describe the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities which represent many unique cultures, heritages, and histories.
3. Explain that the term “Asian American” was first coined in the 1960s as a social and political identity to reject racist terms previously used to identify this group. It was also used to create unity and solidarity among various APIDA groups.
4. Explain how it is important to recognize unique identities and to not see APIDA people as a monolith.

G. Implement the ABC (Agree-Build-Challenge) questioning strategy.

1. Inform students that a noticing is that there are many identifiers for the APIDA community.

2. Have students generate wonderings or questions about this noticing. (For example, students can ask question such as: In what ways is the term “Asian American” inclusive? In what ways is it exclusive? Why and when would using “Asian American” be effective? Why and when would using more specific identifiers such as “Thai American” be more effective?)
3. Select a question to discuss further and have a student make a claim. First, prompt students to agree or disagree with the claim. Second, prompt students to build on the claims made so far. Third, prompt students to generate more questions by challenging the claim.

H. NOTE TO TEACHER: If students need more support understanding identities, have them draw a poster to share how they identify themselves. Have students share their poster in small groups and discuss the importance of recognizing all their unique identities.

I. Inform students that even though there are many different unique identities in the APIDA community, they have been oppressed as a group and denied access to civil rights and citizenship.

J. Have students read the essay on citizenship (see worksheet entitled, “[Essay: Introducing the Theme of Citizenship in APIDA History](#)”). Facilitate a discussion about the essay using the Discussion Questions.

K. NOTE TO TEACHER: If you have limited classroom time, have students complete the reading as a homework assignment the night before you implement this lesson.

L. Discuss the main benefits of U.S. citizenship. (As listed on the [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website](#), benefits include: voting rights, jury duty service, a U.S. passport and travel privileges, family reunification, access to federal jobs, eligibility to run for office, residency rights, eligibility to grants and scholarships, and government benefits, etc.)

1. Have students rank the top three benefits. Have students debate and explain their thinking. (Optional: Implement the ABC (Agree-Build-Challenge) questioning strategy.)
2. Inform students that over the course of U.S. history, certain groups, primarily people of color, were barred from being able to become citizens and that they had to fight for citizenship rights.
3. Facilitate a discussion using this prompt: Why is it easier for some groups to gain citizenship over others? (Optional: In what ways have the citizenship struggles of different communities of color been similar? What does this suggest about how communities of color can work together?)

M. NOTE TO TEACHER: Highlight how for many, U.S. citizenship provides safety, security, and power. For example, the ability to vote gives individuals power and can build community power. In addition, there are financial benefits to citizenship (i.e., government assistance programs, financial aid, etc.). Lastly, there is security that comes with residency. With that stated, mention how citizenship does not guarantee equity, as many U.S. citizens, especially people of color, are often denied justice. If time permits, you can facilitate a discussion about not having U.S. citizenship and/or about undocumented immigrants. Consider implementing The Asian American Education Project’s lesson entitled, “Tereza Lee and Undocumented Asian Americans”:
<https://asianamericanedu.org/undocumented.html>

Activity 3: History of APIDA Citizenship

A. Explain the following to students:

1. Learning about important citizenship dates in U.S. history at the beginning of the unit will develop a more general, overall understanding of U.S. citizenship before analyzing the topic as it relates to the APIDA community specifically.
 2. This timeline is a larger picture in which we will place and understand APIDA history in relation to citizenship, and it also shows how the issue of citizenship has affected other communities as well.
 3. It's important to recognize that APIDA communities have played a vital role in U.S. history. They have been in this country for centuries and have not been passive bystanders. Rather, they and their contributions, histories, and activism have just been ignored and misrepresented. This timeline provides some of that context before we learn some of the wider and deeper history of APIDA communities in the U.S.
- B. Have students complete the worksheet entitled, "[Worksheet: History of U.S. Citizenship](#)" (a timeline):
1. Distribute the worksheet to students and divide them into groups of 3-4. Make sure student groups have access to the Internet.
 2. Complete the first row together; for example, model the following: "The Indian Citizenship Act extends U.S. citizenship to all Native Americans" happened in 1924. Note the significance of this event as Native Americans, who inhabited this land far longer than the settler-colonists who eventually formed the U.S. and created its laws and policies, were excluded from citizenship and all the power and benefits that come with it, not until 1924.
 3. Have student groups work together to complete the timeline.
- C. **NOTE TO TEACHER: If you have limited classroom time, have students complete the reading as a homework assignment the night before you implement this lesson. Or, skip having the students complete the timeline on their own and just provide students with the completed timeline (see [Answer Key: History of U.S. Citizenship](#)).**
- D. Review timeline as a class (see [Answer Key: History of U.S. Citizenship](#)) and facilitate a discussion about the completed timeline using the following prompts:
1. What noticings do you have about the timeline?
 2. What questions do you have about the timeline?
 3. In what ways was gaining U.S. citizenship a struggle and for which groups?
- E. **NOTE TO TEACHER: As an additional activity, assign each student to an event and have them research its historical significance and impact on communities of color. Have students create a poster of the event and host a gallery walk so that all students can learn about the events.**
- F. Discuss the impacts of the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype on the APIDA community's struggle for citizenship rights:
1. Explain to students the following: While this worksheet illustrates how U.S. citizenship has been restricted, it does not paint a full picture of *why* it was restricted.
 2. To better understand this, we need to learn about the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype. This stereotype treats members of APIDA communities as foreign or "the other." This means that no matter how long an APIDA person has lived in the U.S., was born in the U.S. or even has had generations of American-born ancestors, they will still be seen as a foreigner.
 3. This shows up in questions/phrases like "Where are you really from?" or "Go back to your own country!" The Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype is xenophobic and racist as it suggests that the person being questioned is not *really* American because of the way they look or act, implying they don't belong or fit in here.
 4. APIDA communities have been targeted by this stereotype since their early existence in this

country, and the stereotype is a form of systemic racism that has led to segregated schools and decades of exclusion from immigration and citizenship in the U.S.

G. Allow students the opportunity to discuss. Ask them to see how the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype connects to some of the events in the timeline.

H. **NOTE TO TEACHER: If students need more support understanding the Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype, implement The Asian American Education Project’s lesson entitled, “Perpetual Foreigner - Systemic Racism Against Asian Americans”:** <https://asianamericanedu.org/perpetualforeigner.html>. In addition, The Asian American Education Project also offers a lesson about the Model Minority Myth, another stereotype that has plagued APIDA communities: <https://asianamericanedu.org/3.1-Model-Minority-Citizenship: Introducing the Theme of Citizenship in APIDA History/Myth-lesson-plan.html>.

I. Assign students the following task for homework as an assessment: “In one page, describe how and why Asian immigrants were excluded from citizenship until the mid-20th century.”

Activity 4: What it Means to be American

A. Share the poem (primary source) by Calvin Ong entitled, “Day Dreamer” (<https://www.aiisf.org/vor-immigrant-poetry>).

B. Inform students that Calvin Ong is an immigrant from China who sought U.S. citizenship but was detained and deported.

C. Have students make noticings and wonderings about the poem.

D. Ask students the following prompts: What does Calvin Ong’s poem reveal about his feelings? How do you know? How and why does Ong struggle to be American?

E. **NOTE TO TEACHER: If time permits, have students watch the video of Calvin Ong’s interview on the webpage (<https://www.aiisf.org/vor-immigrant-poetry>). Have students discuss Ong’s immigration experience.**

F. Revisit the question of what it means to be American. Ask students how their original thinking has changed based on what they have learned from this lesson.

G. Show students the video “I am an American” by Run AAPI (https://youtu.be/Rne_jxxIbas) and discuss the similarities and differences between this video and the previous video by Ad Council (<https://youtu.be/ISltHnLC0iA>).

H. **NOTE TO TEACHER: As an extension activity, have students create their own “I Am An American” video. Put all the videos together to create a class video.**

I. **If you are teaching this lesson as part of the [Citizenship unit](#):** Inform students that this unit will focus on the theme of citizenship in APIDA history—how APIDA communities were denied citizenship, how they fought for citizenship, and how they defined citizenship. Inform students that the next lesson will focus on how Asian immigrants were legally excluded from

immigrating to the United States.

Further Information

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Tereza Lee and Undocumented Asian America”:
<https://asianamericanedu.org/undocumented.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Perpetual Foreigner - Systemic Racism Against Asian Americans”:
<https://asianamericanedu.org/perpetualforeigner.html>

The Asian American Education Project lesson entitled, “Model Minority Myth”:
<https://asianamericanedu.org/3.1-Model-Minority-Myth-lesson-plan.html>